

Assisting children with depression

Suggestions for teaching staff

Children who are depressed have difficulty concentrating in class and completing their work. Their memory may be affected. They have difficulty relating to classmates and to teaching staff. Their learning suffers and there may be long term effects on their school achievement unless they receive prompt treatment.

How teaching staff can help

Teaching staff can be alert to the possibility of depression as an underlying cause of children's changed behaviour and mood. They can address any school-based triggers for children's distress. Peer group difficulties, especially bullying, are common triggers for children's depression.

Connect with parents and carers

It is important to share information obtained through school observation and to find out whether the child's mood is similar at home. When mood and behaviour changes are evident in more than one setting it usually indicates that the problems are more severe.

Talk with the school psychologist or counsellor about your concerns

Discussion may be helpful in coming to a conclusion about what should be done to help the child who has raised concern. It may lead to a meeting being set up with the parent to talk further.

Give positive feedback

This is important for all children. It is even more important when children are depressed as they are likely to be super attuned to picking up negative feedback about themselves and over reacting to it.

Provide opportunities for success

Let children know you have confidence in their ability and support them to succeed socially and academically.

Encourage getting involved

Children with depression may lack their usual level of energy and complain of being bored. Provide praise for their efforts. Engage them in physical activity and pleasant events.

Model positive actions

Label experiences positively. For example: "That was fun"; "I liked Jack's joke. It made me smile."; "I like stories with happy endings. They make me feel happy too".

Foster positive social relationships

Children who are depressed often withdraw from social contact, however friends can provide critical support. You may need to remind others about how to help everyone feel they belong.

Teach problem solving skills

These can help children who are depressed to generate a range of possible positive solutions.

Provide extra learning support

Teaching staff may need to help the child to catch up once the depression has started to lift. This is important as failing in school can be a source of stress that aggravates depression.

This resource is part of the KidsMatter trial. The team at KidsMatter welcomes your feedback at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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